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**HETEROGENEOUS INTERNAL FRONTIERS: DIVERSE SPECIALIZATION,
COOPERATIVES, AND REORGANIZATION OF TERRITORY IN SANTA
CATARINA, BRAZIL**

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This study analyzes the socioeconomic implications of the evolution of the agricultural production structure in Santa Catarina, southern Brazil, through the lens of internal frontiers, political economy, and rural development. It investigates the hypothesis that the state, due to its historical trajectory of late modernization that favored family farming and high productive diversity, has undergone a particular territorial transformation driven by commodity agriculture. Methodologically, we employ the Shannon Index to measure crop diversity and a productive specialization index, using municipal-level data over time. The results reveal two complexity elements. Firstly, Santa Catarina's agricultural diversity,

despite being among the highest in Brazil, is in decline. Secondly, its productive specialization index is rising; however, although soybean production is consolidated nationwide, soy expansion does not, by itself, explain the highest levels of specialization observed within individual municipalities. In most cases, other commodities linked to capitalized family farmers and their cooperatives, such as rice and apples, play a more significant role. The main territorial particularity is that the advancement of a soybean frontier does not fully explain the regional reorganization. The consolidation of highly specialized internal frontiers, dominated by well-capitalized family farmer cooperatives, raises the question of whether there are qualitatively different implications for unequal processes of capital accumulation and territorial control. We argue that Santa Catarina exemplifies that the contemporary process of internal frontier formation — where capital expands into a diversified landscape, eroding broad diversity while creating clusters of intense, specialized production — is not a homogeneous process. Well-capitalized family farmers and their organizations maintain a heterogeneous territory, not by transcending capitalist relations, but by reorganizing surplus appropriation and territorial embeddedness in ways that partially mitigate external extraction. However, the social benefits are limited since this surplus reorganization reproduces internal differentiation and new forms of exclusion.

Palavras-chave: commodity frontiers; family farming; territorial development; productive specialization; santa catarina.